

2014.02.06 Turkey Advisory Committee Meeting

Attendance

- Scott Walter, DNR Wildlife
- Tom Isaac, DNR Wildlife
- Sean Neverman, DNR Law Enforcement
- Jim Holzwart, DNR Wildlife
- Dave Matheys, DNR Wildlife
- Ralph Fritsch, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
- Richard Kirchmeyer, Wisconsin Bowhunters' Association
- Arlyn Splitt, Wisconsin Conservation Congress
- John Kubisiak, DNR Retired
- Carrie Milestone, DNR Wildlife
- Kevin Morgan, DNR Wildlife
- Matt Zine, DNR Natural Heritage Conservation
- Rick Horton, National Wild Turkey Federation
- Krista McGinley, DNR Wildlife
- Brian Dhuey, DNR Science Services
- Linda Olver, DNR Customer Service & Licensing
- Scott Anderson, U.S. Forest Service
- Bill Vander Zouwen, DNR Retired
- Tim Barton, hunter / member of the public
- Tim Eisele, freelance outdoor writer

Summary of fall 2013 harvest & spring 2014 permit drawing

- An uptick in permits and a drop in harvest characterize the 2013 fall season. Permit applications went up by 21,000; nearly 15,000 of those came from patron license holders. We think the new easier application process caused the increase, rather than an increase in interest. Harvest dropped substantially: production was down 50% statewide in 2013, the winter of 2012/2013 lasted longer than usual, and June was an unusually wet month. Many permit holders weren't interested in actively pursuing turkeys. 35% drop in harvest from 2012. Sean: did we see any increase in spring applications for 2014? No, not in overall application numbers, but we didn't go very far into breaking the numbers down to see how patrons fit in. Looking at the graph of harvest per day, we can see that the extended season in TMZs 1-5 is pretty popular. Total number of turkeys harvested during the last week of the season is greater than during the first week. Obvious lack of turkey hunting effort during the 9-day gun deer season. Looking at hen harvest during the 2013 fall season: hen harvest is minimal in the north where we're most concerned. In TMZs 6 and 7, only one hen harvested per 75-85 square miles of timber.

Thursday, February 6, 2014

- Spring 2014: 101,865 OTC permits remaining after the drawing, in all zones for at least the last two time periods.

Future of turkey hunting in State Park units

- State Park zones will no longer exist starting in spring 2015, with the possible exception of Leow Lake. Scott Loomans left that off originally (because it's forest and a disabled zone), but we're encouraging him to clean the slate completely. Note that this isn't fully approved yet, but we think it'll sail through. Given the opening date of the license year, we had to discuss how hunters would apply for the 2015 spring season. We decided to keep the state park options available and then just issue permits for the broader zone containing the park unit if the change passes. However, Linda was talking with her IT folks and Mark Rappe brought up a potential issue. A person who can't get a park permit might not want to hunt in that zone after all. We might just contact the ~650 folks who apply and ask them if they'd like to change their permit. We can't just get rid of the state park options because they haven't for sure been eliminated. How many people will wait until the last minute to apply, though? What do we do for them? Scott agrees that we should contact folks.

Review of draft Wild Turkey Management Plan revision

- Background: Bill worked with the committee 17 years ago to draft the current plan (1996). These plans are typically due for revision after 10 years, and we tried in 2007 (gathering public feedback that we still retain), and again in 2011, but it was difficult to get direction from the public input. We re-engaged the public input process in April and May of 2012, meeting with 77 members of the public in 11 Wisconsin cities. An online survey (the same as was offered at the meetings) was filled out by over 2,000 people across the state. Then we sat down with the committee to determine the format for the plan, and decided we needed a more comprehensive document in terms of its value as a form of outreach (increase transparency of turkey management, to tout the value of the turkey resource, etc.). The plan would end up as an all-inclusive summary of the turkey program, rather than focusing just on goals and future directions. The first section completed covered the history of turkey management and was reviewed by the taskforce in August 2012. Then, Scott & Krista worked with a few other co-authors to come up with the final draft we're looking at today. Our goal today is to comb through the final draft and end up with something we're comfortable advancing on to the Wildlife Policy Team. Some things still missing: introductory section taking the form of a letter describing what the document

Thursday, February 6, 2014

is intended to do and acknowledging past guidance, a summary following the goals section containing management implications, a table of contents, labels for all figures/images/charts, a format that's accessible by your average turkey hunter, and a section listing literature cited (already pretty complete).

- John K: it's helpful to have an abstract and an executive summary. They'll help the average reader interpret the contents and important elements / key points. We've got a lot of material that may intimidate the average reader. He likes the current 3-section format (history, current knowledge / research, goals for the future).
- Bill VZ: congratulations! What we've learned about turkeys and turkey hunters is incredible, and it's well-documented here. Such great, comprehensive information. His only suggestion would be a concise condensed second version that's more focused on future directions. It's the most comprehensive plan he's seen, and the only one that lays out what we've accomplished from what the old plan laid out.
- Rick H: it wouldn't hurt to have break-out boxes that contain the more technical information (i.e. population dynamics). He likes the outline style, but he hopes that the end publication will be formatted differently (more like a book with chapters/sections to make it more readable - like the old Ecology & Management publication). Luckily we have Mary Kay Salwey waiting in the wings to do exactly that.
- John K: it's important to use numbers that are easy for the audience to comprehend. We broke out the three big Wisconsin turkey research projects and summarized them, and that's the angle that Scott tried to take. Maybe we can make the information even easier to read.
- TAXONOMY: Carrie shared this with some other folks, and all of them picked up on the 6 subspecies (in a bad way). We need to think of how we'll address this. Maybe change the wording to include "different opinions" and "common perceptions". Note that NWTF's subspecies map was last updated in 1999, so it's not the most accurate.
- PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: the aging and sexing diagram needs work; it needs to be in color and of higher quality (maybe use the images from the old poster).
- DISTRIBUTION & POPULATION STATUS: Rick thinks we should add a paragraph about market hunting (The Gamekeepers included something about the price of a turkey in the Milwaukee markets in 1880) – elaborate on the role that market hunting

Thursday, February 6, 2014

played in the demise of the state's turkey population. Brian: if we do that, we need to hit hard on how regulated management/hunting is what brought turkeys back.

- FALL AND WINTER: do we mention budding behavior by turkeys? Rich is seeing that up north. Yes, it does look like Scott mentions that. John: deer enable turkeys to feed in winter in a lot of places - mention that coexistence. Rich agrees. Hillside slopes are another mitigating factor in the south; when deer bed down.
- POPULATION DYNAMICS: a lot of information here is necessarily technical; we can't simplify it much further. We have to let the public know what biologists think about when making management decisions. Ralph: it's a good idea to include this info, even if only a few people will be interested at first. People tend to become more accepting of management tactics once they see some of the charts and figures. Plus, the folks who read it will hopefully talk about it to those who don't.
- CLUTCH SIZE AND HATCHABILITY: Arlyn: do we include any of the mortality caused by farmers? Scott thinks he mentions hay mowing as a potential mortality factor, but it hasn't been assessed other than by Pollentier (loss of only 2 out of 139 nests). That will vary by region and year.
- THE ISSUE OF PREDATION: came into being after our experience with the Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan addendum. Rick and Brian think it's a great idea. Would this be the place to mention some of Pollentier's data about predation mortality being higher in forested landscapes than in open landscapes? It's mentioned later on, but we could talk about it here as well in a more general manner. Anybody should be able to grasp the message of this section, which is that with really good habitat, it doesn't matter how many predators there are. Habitat management is vastly more important than predator management.
- WINTER WEATHER: we developed a really nice index, better than the one for deer, which uses a sliding scale for temperature and snow depth (the Winter Turkey Factor). Its utility in terms of management isn't really known yet, but there may be great utility in how we communicate weather effects to the public. Brian: we need to stress the fact that there will be fluctuations in the turkey population, especially in the north, attached to winter weather. Turkeys in the north WILL die, and we need to get away from the perception that we'll try to maintain turkeys at a certain level in the north. We never expected turkeys to flourish there in the first place. Winter is tough, and individuals will die, but populations will thrive, and we focus our efforts on populations. We will not release any additional birds, we will not encourage supplemental winter feeding, etc. John: Rolley's 1998 paper tried to correlate

Thursday, February 6, 2014

weather in March (especially precipitation) to hen vitality heading into the breeding season; mention this. Rich: let the public know what parameters we use in the index (type of snow, depth of snow, temperature).

- THE GOBBLER SURVIVAL STUDY: General note - instead of using confidence intervals, John would like us to use "about", "approximately", etc. We don't want to pin ourselves down or to have these numbers used against us. This study provides our only estimates of harvest rates for gobblers.
- PERCEPTIONS OF TURKEY ABUNDANCE: Rick likes the graphic. Is there something similar that shows the changes in home ranges in winter? We could make home range polygons instead of using discrete locations. We'll have a lot more opportunities to use graphics to help tell the story when we move to the magazine format. Use Pollentier's data. The goal is to illustrate how uneven turkey distribution can be. John is wondering if we have any exact numbers that show just how far a turkey can disperse. Scott might put that information into the fall and winter section on page 5 (mention importance of dispersal as far as colonizing new habitats).
- HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WILD TURKEYS IN WISCONSIN: here we only mention 5 subspecies found in North America! Scott will change it to 6 and make a comment back in the taxonomy section that there's disagreement.
- SEASON STRUCTURE: Linda has a comment regarding consistency: on page 21 we say turkeys face increased metabolic demands below 50 degrees, but on page 10 that number is 52 degrees. The correct number is 52 and Scott made that edit.
- TURKEY MANAGEMENT ZONES: Maybe we should let Mary Kay fix the color schemes. Linda noted that the state park zones aren't included on the map or in any of the data summaries. It's not because they aren't important, but they add too much detail that isn't necessarily vital. Scott is wondering if we even need to include this map. Maybe we can simplify it to just old zones vs. new zones. Nope, it sounds like the committee likes having this graphic. Brian thinks the explanation for the zone consolidation could use some rejiggering (he would be more blunt and say it was prohibitive to manage on such a small scale when we lacked the data to support it).
- SPRING & FALL SEASONS: we can add to the table to account for Act 168. Tom: didn't we have an intermediary 1 p.m. close at some point before going to 5 p.m.?
- HARVEST: Matt - on the grassland page 26, either stick with percent or decimal on the Y axis and stick with the same scale for all figures. This figure did stretch Scott's Excel skills, but he'll try to clean it up a bit. Back on page 25, Brian doesn't want us to

use weather impacts to explain the harvest decline. We don't even mention the population dynamics phenomenon following reintroduction, and we really should. Rick wants us to add a red line showing permit numbers to the harvest graphs. We don't want people to think that the graphs show population; make it clear that hunter interest/effort has a big impact on harvest. The rest of the committee agrees. Scott can add 2012 and 2013 data to the hen harvest table. Is it more meaningful to use hens per square mile of forest or square miles of forest per hen? Sounds like we'll keep it as-is. Rick: online and phone-in registration systems. Do we do anything to estimate percentage compliance? Brian does have some of that data that we haven't used yet, and we can add it in (maybe in the registration section).

- HUNTER PARTICIPATION: Brian says this shows permit issuance rather than hunter participation, so we should change the title. Rick thinks the bar graph makes it hard to discern trends within/between zones. A line graph might show the trends within zones better than this. It's distorted the way it is now, something that's always a problem with this type of bar graph. We'd need a multi-part line graph. Scott thinks it works if you can train yourself to follow just one zone through the graph. Rich: who is going to be looking at this graph? People on the committee can figure it out, but your average reader might not be able to. Those folks would prefer a simpler line graph. There are a lot of graphs like this throughout the document, so the change would need to be systemic. Ralph thinks we should leave it the way it is, and it sounds like that's what we'll do. John thinks we could make an appendix available with expanded information. Scott thought about that, including full data tables behind the graphs, with more fleshed-out discussion of complex issues, but in the end he decided not to do it. Appendices are too often ignored.
- REGISTRATION: mention compliance and means of estimation
- HUNTER SURVEYS: Brian will get Scott the data for the 10-week brood survey graph so he can make it more consistent with the other graphs' design. We don't talk about our overall goals related to hunter success and satisfaction (actually, we address that when we get into the goals section... Brian just hasn't read that far).
- A PROFILE OF WISCONSIN'S TURKEY HUNTER: Brian would get rid of this section, since it only covers a small portion of survey history. Sean wants us to keep it – as somebody who took the 2012 public survey, he wants to see the results and believes other respondents would as well. Maybe we should keep it as a snapshot with only the most recent information, and make sure readers know that the information will change.

- **HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS FOR WISCONSIN TURKEYS:** This section is a bit out of balance; it contains a lot of information in comparison to some of the other segments. Even though Tami's section approved a final version, it's part of a larger plan and will therefore go through some "sifting and winnowing". She's OK with that as long as she sees what we want to do with it before it's finalized. Could we reduce this information to some sort of table? Are capture myopathy and rehabilitation necessary? Tom thinks diseases we've experienced in Wisconsin should get the most emphasis (Carrie agrees). Rick: it might be helpful for people to know the symptoms attached to each disease if they come across a sick bird. Maybe we could put the disease information on our website and just direct our readers there (like the deer diseases page we have). Jim & Bill: we should just put a general summary in population dynamics (turkeys are susceptible to these diseases, but there's no evidence that these diseases are having a negative impact on turkeys in Wisconsin). OR we could include a section on overall disease impacts on turkeys in Juvenile and Adult Survival, leaving the table in the disease section (with columns for disease, symptoms, health/population impacts, and occurrence in WI). The committee is questioning whether this section really needs to be a part of the management plan. Dave reminds us that it'll need to be a part of the plan should a disease break out; we've just been lucky so far.
- **TURKEY DAMAGE:** how hard would it be to update this section to include 2012 and 2013? Not hard at all; Scott will ask Brad Koele. How much of the hunting license cost goes toward crop depredation? Scott will try to track down that information. Linda says it's a \$2 wildlife surcharge (\$4 for patron license). This gets divided between many different species damage programs.
- **NUISANCE TURKEYS:** it's a huge issue in Tom's area; their new biologist, Dianne Robinson, is struggling with a herd of turkeys that's ravaging downtown Milwaukee. In this section, he tried to keep it general enough to allow a lot of flexibility in management actions. He's wide open to changes, and wants input and guidance on what to do about urban turkeys. Dianne has put together some draft nuisance factsheets to post on the DNR website. For the management plan, what should we include about nuisance turkeys? How much detail should we go into? Scott thinks what Tom put together is sufficient for the plan. However, what he sees coming out of the goal is some nice documents (like what Dianne has started) that can be distributed so people know what they can do on their own before contacting agency staff. Rick: urban nuisance is different from agricultural nuisance. Turkeys don't cause significant agricultural damage outside of Marathon County (focus on education). Page 48: funding may be available to assist municipalities. That

Thursday, February 6, 2014

statement came from Scott's conversation with Dan Hirchert (not Tom). He'll double-check.

- ECONOMIC IMPACTS: would NWTF have any information like this on economic impacts of turkey hunting? Not that Rick is aware of, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Scott will do a little more research. Rich thinks the fall numbers are high, considering how many hunters are only pursuing turkeys incidentally. This information might have some utility when we arrive at our discussion about eliminating the fall permit drawing. Bill: do we talk about the money that goes into the general Fish & Wildlife account? Yes, it looks like we do, and we don't need to go into more detail.
- WILD TURKEY STAMP PROGRAM: Carrie - need to make the pie chart more attractive/informative. Maybe add a percentage as well.
- A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: Our overall goal will remain the same as it's always been.
- PROGRESS TOWARD PREVIOUS PLAN OBJECTIVES
- OBJECTIVE 1: It's not meaningful for us to have a population goal. Since this section originally confused Matt, Rick is wondering if we should put "1996" in front of every objective so the readers know it's the OLD objective and not a new goal. Scott will comb through this section and make certain that we use 1996 and 2014 to refer to the respective plan versions.
- OBJECTIVE 4: Arlyn doesn't think the oak graph means a whole lot because there isn't much oak where he's from, yet they still have plenty of turkeys. The oak resource seems to be irrelevant in many parts of the state. Indeed, recent research suggests that forest type doesn't matter. However, NWTF has seen that turkey productivity tracks very nicely with mast production. John: oak isn't just valuable for acorns; it's important for its understory as well. Add the NWTF Wisconsin focal landscapes to the list of 3 concrete examples of progress toward oak promotion.
- OBJECTIVE 5: double-check the most recent number of Turkey Hunter Education Clinic events.
- ENACT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO PROTECT TURKEY POPULATIONS AND OPTIMIZE HUNTER OPPORTUNITY AND SATISFACTION (need a better intro here to separate from 1996 objectives)

Thursday, February 6, 2014

- 1) CONTINUE MANDATORY REGISTRATION: Brian would like to strike the word "county", but it's something we collect with the current registration systems, so maybe we'll keep it (despite the fact that we don't use it for anything). Tom thinks if we ever had something like a disease outbreak or a dip in the harvest, wouldn't this info be useful? Brian just thinks it's unreasonable to think we can manipulate/change anything on a county scale. If we want it gone, it's a nice time to suggest it to Linda so it can be worked into the new licensing system. Looks like we're striking county from the list.
- 3) USE ANNUAL SPRING AND FALL HARVEST DATA: John is a bit concerned about the accuracy of hunters aging and sexing their own birds. We should add "develop means of detecting observer bias" to the list of products. Brian doesn't think any other states do this; we assume a certain level of expertise. Rick wonders if it's really a reflection of productivity when we know hunters are biased and selecting for adult gobblers. Scott does try to sort out the correlation among more accurate biological data; could we use this to develop a correction factor? We ask hunters if they shot the first bird they saw in the annual surveys. Rick is just worried that we're skewing the data. Hunters used to take the first bird they saw, but now they'll pass on a dozen jakes for the chance to get a nice tom.
- 5) MONITOR HUNTER ATTITUDES: Ralph thinks we're getting ourselves into trouble with a fixed value of 80%. But what will we say instead? Arlyn thinks we should leave it in there; it's a high number, and every year there's talk of change and our most reliable response is that "X% of people are happy with the way things are." This data was immensely valuable in the past when the question of a 6-week continuous season came up. Rick thinks we should repeat the 2012 survey on a regular basis so we have current data; maybe we could build it into the spring and fall turkey hunter questionnaires. Jim thinks we should lower the number; does 70% sound reasonable? Well, what if we end up with 69%? What's our action then? Add another product: when satisfaction falls below the threshold, hunters will be queried to gauge their level of support for various alternatives as determined by the committee.
- 6) REDUCE FALL PERMIT LEVELS AS NECESSARY: Scott's not happy with this strategy, but he felt he had to come up with some threshold at which the committee will start thinking about permit reductions (something we've never done). Are turkeys grouse or are they deer? Scott strongly believes that we should not worry about fluctuations in turkey numbers brought about by weather, because those are the things driving turkey populations. That will never change. Harvest is not significant,

Thursday, February 6, 2014

and it's not going to hinder recovery of the population. All we end up doing is to limit hunter opportunity, to no benefit to the turkeys and at the potential risk of losing hunters. However, a large portion of the hunting population doesn't feel the same way. Scott would rather stick to biological motives and really educate people to make up for the social motives. He's hoping we'll never need to employ this strategy. The only two situations we're keeping it around for are 1) several years of extremely harsh winters that greatly reduce the population or 2) a disease outbreak. John wants us to say "adjust" instead of "reduce". It's more important to provide opportunity. Rick thinks we just want to say that we retain the ability/option to make adjustments as we see fit, in response to whatever issues might arise, and just get rid of the more specific triggers. Should we just say that we only adjust permits to adjust public perceptions, fully recognizing that there aren't any biological implications?

- 8) REFINE ESTIMATES OF HABITAT AVAILABILITY: Reword. Square miles of timber are intended for estimates of hunter density, not turkey habitat.
- 9) INCREASE TURKEY HUNTER ACCESS TO PRIVATE LANDS: when we ask the hunters, 88% of them say they don't have a hard time finding a place to hunt. But we're still placing a huge emphasis on getting more access (and paying money to do so). We should examine how that breaks down by zone. Maybe the issue of access to land in Zone 2 isn't as bad as we're making it out to be. Access seems to be more difficult on public land in Zone 2. Jim thinks we should revise our strategy to focus on access for Zone 2 hunters, since the rest of the state seems to be happy. The rest of the narrative talks about Zone 2, but the strategy is worded to be statewide. Change title to add "primarily in Zone 2" to the end. We have an imperfect understanding of what it's like for the average turkey hunter, and for that reason, funding increased access in Zone 2 makes sense. Will we be able to benefit enough people with the amount of money we spend?
- 1) DEFINE SPATIALLY-EXPLICIT TURKEY HABITAT ENHANCEMENT GOALS: Matt would like to encourage native plant species. Scott will need to adjust the map since it shows Deer Management Units, which will shortly be obsolete.
- 2) CONTINUE TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT OAK REGENERATION: do we want to mention any other turkey food resources besides oak? No, this strategy is about oak, but it doesn't mean we don't mention other resources in other strategies. Regeneration AND management.
- 3) EDUCATE HUNTERS: scratch "growth" and just talk about turkey populations. Use "impacting" instead of "limiting".

Thursday, February 6, 2014

- 2) COMMUNICATE WITH MUNICIPALITIES: Dianne Robinson has already had this idea and has made steps to pursue it; we should work with her to expand.
- INVEST WILD TURKEY STAMP FUNDS: this is the status quo. There are no strategies listed, since they'll be set during the biennial review and we don't want any long-term requirements that supersede the committee.
- Literature cited - we're happy to take suggestions about additions. John thinks we should check out something by John Lewis. Also symposium proceedings that referenced effect of hunter densities. Look up and include.

Elimination of fall permit drawing

- No time to discuss

Increase or eliminate the maximum group size for group applications

- No time to discuss

Winter severity discussion

- No time to discuss

Turkey Hunter Access Program update

- No time to discuss

Partner updates & announcements

- None

Public input

- None